



David W. Blagys, Executive Director

**H.B. No. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING  
JUNE THIRTIETH 2019, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

**Appropriations Committee  
February 20, 2017**

Thank you Senator Formica, Senator Osten, Representative Walker and committee members for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Wakeman Boys & Girls Club regarding proposed changes to the funding allocation and recipient criteria of the Neighborhood Youth Center Grant.

Changes in this grant will result in the reduction of services to our most vulnerable youth and teens in Fairfield and Bridgeport. Wakeman Boys & Girls Club plays a critical role in serving our community's youth, and relies heavily on this grant. We are hopeful that you will see the great benefit in maintaining the disbursement of these funds as in the past.

For more than 100 years Wakeman Boys & Girls Club has been providing the youth in our community with quality programs, but one could argue that the work we are doing now is more important than ever. Please consider what Wakeman Boys & Girls Club provides to nearly 3,700 youth and teens in our local community:

At our Smilow-Burroughs Clubhouse in Bridgeport:

- More than 600 children take part in our After School Program and Summer Camp program annually. Academic success and healthy lifestyles are the focus of both of these structured programs and as a result members have improved their grades and increased their physical fitness and we have been successful at reducing the "summer slide".
- STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) programming provides members with important learning opportunities, including Khan Academy, coding classes, Sikorsky STEM Mentoring Program, Lego Robotics, and Sea Research Foundation STEM Mentoring Program.
- The diplomas2Degrees college-readiness program has guided dozens of teens through middle and high school and helped them apply for college, navigate the financial aid process, find scholarships, and most importantly, attend college. Nearly all teens in this program are the first in their families to attend college.

At our Southport Clubhouse in Fairfield:

- More than 300 children come to the Clubhouse each day for tutoring and homework time, fitness and recreation activities and enrichment programs.
- 200 middle and high school students take part in monthly community service and leadership programs and provide thousands of hours of volunteer service in the greater community
- More than 1,000 children participate in sports leagues that teach good sportsmanship, teamwork, and the basics of the game.

At our McKinley School Outreach Extension:

- Programming is provided to support students, families and classrooms in a school found by the Connecticut State Board of Education to be racially imbalanced.
- An award-winning mentoring program pairs 75 teen volunteers one-on-one with McKinley students to support their academic success, social skills, and fitness activities.
- DIY STEM programming creates an atmosphere of enthusiastic exploration and critical thinking for 24 youth led by teen volunteers, science teacher and a mechanical engineer.

At our Lighthouse Program at Geraldine Claytor Magnet STEAM Academy:

- A STEAM focused after school program began in partnership with the City of Bridgeport and GMCA coinciding with the school's opening in January 2017 across from the P.T. Barnum Apartments.

More than 150 programs are offered through Wakeman Boys & Girls Club annually, all which provide critical services and support to youth in a safe, supervised place. Our Clubhouses are open after school, in the evenings, on weekends and on most state and federal holidays. Extended hours on these holidays and during our summer camp provide working parents the flexibility to bring their children to our Clubhouses and still make it to work on time.

Research shows that from 3pm-6pm juvenile crime increases dramatically. In Bridgeport, the need for safe, structure programming is especially critical. According to the FBI, Bridgeport is one of the most dangerous cities in America and the wide achievement gap in the state directly affects Bridgeport students. While the statistics are grim, the opportunity is great...but only if we have the necessary funding to keep our doors open, hire staff – including teens, and run high-impact programs that change our members' lives for the better. Each day, our members benefit from programs developed by national experts and local best practices to learn, grow and stay on track to graduate. This state funding is essential to ensuring these critical programs continue for our youth.

Boys & Girls Clubs in Connecticut receive funding through the Neighborhood Youth Center Grant and use that funding to implement programs that improve academic success, develop healthy lifestyles, and build good character and citizenship in our members. More than any other area, our Club's focus on supporting academic success has increased significantly in recent years as we identify and recruit youth into the Club in need of tutoring, mentoring and hands-on learning. These programs enable our Club to reinforce what is being taught in school, provide vital mentoring for youth, and give support to many children and teens who are desperately in need of a safe place to spend their time.

Boys & Girls Clubs in Connecticut are part of our state's history and landscape for more than one-hundred years, dedicating much of our efforts to help close the achievement gap for so many young people who attend our clubs. Clubs have a very real impact on a young people's lives during the critical out of school time, on weekends and in the summer months. The state of Connecticut has been a great partner in the collective effort to bring opportunities to those children who are challenged by the achievement gap. We are steadfast in our commitment, but cannot do it alone – continuation of Neighborhood Youth Center Grant funding is crucial to our success in guiding youth and teens toward success.

On behalf of all of our members at Wakeman Boys & Girls Club and the youth who benefit from Boys & Girls Clubs programming across the state, please consider maintaining the Neighborhood Youth Center funding so all of our communities serving at-risk youth are able to continue to positively impact the futures of our next generation.